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it attentively, till the crab seized a finger in its claws. He then threw it down, but continued to watch it eagerly. Having remarked the animal's mode of walking, he became indignant, kicked it from before him, and ordered Khadjio, one of his suite, to drive it out of the room. It was long before he recovered from the disagreeable sensation produced on his mind by the crab. 'I never saw such a cowardly animal,' he said; 'and if I ever fancied the devil, it was in that likeness.'

At first, he went a great deal into society, and liked balls, though he disapproved of the dress-coats worn by European gentlemen, and also of the bare shoulders exposed by ladies; the latter being a temptation which mortal man, says the Imam, is too weak to look upon. He liked the theatre too, and especially the dancing; but the uncovered faces of so many women troubled him, and he soon ceased his attendance. Now, when invited anywhere, he asks if ladies will be present. If the reply is affirmative, he refuses. His religion, he says, teaches him to object to unveiled women. But he is not bigoted on the subject, and is quite willing to discuss it.

The captive Imam still excites some curiosity, but it is rapidly dying away; and he will soon be as little talked of or thought about as Timour Meerza, or Abd-el-Kader.

THE FAST CANAL-BOAT.

THE other day, I was one of a party of more or less scientific persons who made a trip from the City Basin to Paddington Stop, on the London Grand Junction Canal. Our object was to note the success of an experiment which has already gladdened the hearts of canal proprietors, and which promises a large boon to that portion of the public in the habit of intrusting goods to the hands of carriers.

When it is said that the experiment in question was neither more nor less than the application of steam-power to the boats and barges employed in carrying various kinds of merchandise on canals, it may probably occur to many readers that such an improvement on the old mode of propulsion is very obvious, very simple, and very easy. Were this the case, steam would long ago have superseded horse-power on canals; but when the subject is practically considered, many difficulties arise, the chief of which is the swell of the water caused by the action of paddles, and even by that of an ordinary screw. The narrow channels of these watery highways are confined by artificial banks, which would be seriously damaged by any considerable displacement of water, and in some parts quite washed away.

Before describing what I venture to call an interesting journey, I will beg my reader's kind indulgence for a few statistical facts relating to canal traffic, and also to canals regarded as property. There are in the United Kingdom nearly five thousand miles of canals, representing a capital of certainly not less than L.40,000,000, and perhaps a good deal more. Before railways were invented, canal property flourished exceedingly, and a nominal hundred pounds in canal scrip may have meant three hundred or four hundred, or even five hundred pounds in actual money. Those were brave days, at least for canal proprietors; but their light has faded to such a mere glimmer, that a share in the Grand Junction Canal Company, nominally worth a hundred pounds, cannot be viewed by brokers and capitalists as anything more than seventy pounds, if so much. It need scarcely be said that the railway system, which has driven the time-honoured stage-coach and post-chaise off the road, has likewise proved the Nemesis of canal stock. And yet, strange to tell, the enormous depreciation in the value of shares is by no means justified by a falling off in the way of business. Canals are more in use now than they ever were. According to the last returns, 25,000 tons more merchandise are conveyed by canal in the course of a single year than in any year previous to the commencement of railway operations in Great Britain. Excepting where a rapid transit is desirable at all hazards, the safe carriage by canal-boat is even preferable to the goods-train, which has rather a bad character for getting in the way of other trains, particularly express ones; and the trifling advantage of five per cent., which is all that the canal companies offer below the railway scale of goods-carriage, is even worth considering by persons who have any very large dealings with carriers. Of late years, canal stock may be said to have suffered from panic and prejudice more than anything. It would indeed be five thousand pities, should those five thousand miles of waterway prove at last the road to ruin. A townsman has little idea of the beauty which the artificial rivers of a flat country add to the face of nature. He thinks of a canal as he sees it—a straight, formal cutting, filled with water of a sooty tinge, and a greasy lustre; nor does the vision of that same stream winding clear through flowery meads and pleasant woodlands, ever occur to him. Yet there be places which our canal-boatman wots of, where the trees meet overhead; and parks come sloping down to the water. On this account, the permanent way of a canal has one great advantage over that of a railway; its presence, fertilising as well as ornamental, is in the majority of cases rather courted than repelled, and exorbitant claims of compensation have been rare in canal history.

Until the year 1848, canal companies were prohibited by law from being carriers; but in the parliamentary session of that year, an act was passed removing the disqualification. The effect has been, of course, to increase very materially the revenue of these bodies, which formerly depended solely on tolls. The Grand Junction Canal Company has now about two hundred and fifty boats of its own. Another legislative act, of no further date than last year, forbids the amalgamation of railway and canal property, and insures to the public the benefit of a fair competition.

These matters have furnished part of our talk on the wharf of the Grand Junction Canal Company, off which is lying the steam fly-boat *Pioneer*. Our little party seems a large one when we have all embarked, and are forced to elbow one another for standing-room. A fly-boat, my readers will bear in mind, is the long narrow barge, not more than seven feet wide anywhere, and approximating to seventy-five in length, which contrasts favourably in shape and general liveliness of appearance with the black, flat, broad, and immensely ugly coal-barge, also employed in canal navigation. A fly-boat carries her cargo almost as high above her hold as deep in it. The goods are piled in a heap that narrows to a fourteen-inch plank at the top; and the whole is covered with tarpaulin. Along the top ridge walks the bargeman, this footway being his only means of bodily communication between the stem of the boat and his cabin in the steerage. A queer little hole is that same cabin, the effect of entering which is to make you feel like Gulliver in the Quinbus Flestrin stage of his adventures. It is a Lilliputian interior, not after the model of any one room in a house, but like the cobbler's establishment celebrated in song—a condensed hotch-potch of parlour, and kitchen, and all. By simply turning round once upon your heel, you may scorch your clothes against the stove, sweep down everything on the opposite side of the cabin, knock yourself against the door at one end, and finish by tumbling into bed at the other. The decoration of the cabin is cheerful, and, in the brightness of its red and yellow panelling, pleasantly recalls the Dutch toys of infancy, and the mysterious domesticity of a travelling show. It may be superfluous to add, that

the apartment is decidedly stuffy, the atmosphere being that of a tailor's workshop over an oven. Some canal-boats are family-boats—a man, his wife, and four or five children occupying the toy-house which I have attempted to describe; but the companies do not own any such boats as these, which all belong to private proprietors.

Our steam fly-boat, the *Pioneer*, presented some features of modification which may be briefly noted. Her boiler and engine occupied the usual space of the Dutch cabin, which was removed forward, thus diminishing the room for stowage. The *Pioneer* is a new boat, expressly built for the purpose of steam-traffic; but neither boat nor machinery appeared to me so trim and ship-shape as their newness would have augured. It seems, however, that great improvements are to be made, now that the success of the main experiment has been placed beyond question. For instance, the ordinary tiller, which takes up a great deal too much room to work in, will give way in favour of a wheel; the machinery will thus get more space, and the cabin will be built over it. Of course, the wheel by which the boat is to be steered will be placed before instead of abaft the cabin and engine, just as it is placed on the deck of large vessels, before the poop. All these things are to come.

We will take the *Pioneer* as we find her, which is thus—the helmsman has a space in the stern just large enough to work his tiller in; then there is a small raised scrap of deck, with a light iron railing at each side, and the cone-shaped boiler cropping up in the middle; then comes the cabin; and in advance of that is the piled-up cargo in its tarpaulin case; for I should state that this trip of the *Pioneer* is a real business trip, with no nonsense about it, but, on the contrary, a large amount of timber and heavy grocery goods, which are very serious affairs. The *Pioneer* is going all the way to Wolverhampton, though we amateurs are bound no further than to the Gauge House at Paddington Stop.

It is as cold a day, and as much like winter at last, as the most determined stickler for old-fashioned seasonable weather could wish at the close of the English year. It is freezing, sharp, and, after having been delightfully bright and bracing till noon, is now making up its mind to snow. It does snow a little, just as the *Pioneer* starts, at half-past one o'clock, from the Company's wharf. The assembled porters, boatmen, and other servants of the Company, standing on the quay, give lusty cheers for the *Pioneer*.

Off we go, very steadily, but at a speed which is rapid to that of the ordinary locomotion on canals; indeed, we are travelling just twice as quickly as we should travel by horse-haulage. Our way lies for some distance where no horse can tow barge or boat, but where boats and barges are usually propelled by human power. We are going underground, through a brick tunnel no larger than a sewer. The *Pioneer* has another fly-boat in tow, laden with a similar cargo, and some extraordinary precautions are requisite on this novel occasion. We keep one side of the waterway, and the second boat keeps the other; so that, in case of the *Pioneer* having to slacken speed, and Number Two getting too much way on her, she shall not run into our stern. Boats are taken through this tunnel so slowly by the old fashion, that they meet without any danger, though each keeps midway till hailed by the vessel coming in an opposite direction. The simple but arduous process of 'legging' has hitherto been in practice. A board is placed out from either side of the fly-boat, and on this board lies a man, with his feet against the slimy wall of the tunnel. In this position, he walks horizontally, and so, by great exertion, moves the boat. Two men are employed in the operation, and it seems wonderful that they should find time, on hearing the signal of an approaching boat, to rise from their recumbent attitude, ship their planks, and get the boat to one side of the tunnel, so as to pass in safety. The *Pioneer* will have done good service, if only in having led the way to an abolition of this dreadful duty of 'legging,' which so exhausts the men that, on their quitting a long tunnel near Birmingham, they are as wet from perspiration as if they had just been dragged out of the canal.

Our Cockney tunnel, however, is not so tediously protracted an affair, though long enough, I should think, to suit the majority of tastes for odd ways of travelling. For a little while after we have entered it, the water has a dark, clear look, and the sharp edges of its ripples catch the distant light with a rather solemn effect. The yellow atmosphere, seen through the round arch of our narrow tunnel, takes the shape and appearance of a moon half set in gloomy waves. Its large semicircle is obscured presently by the smoke from our funnel, the *Pioneer* being so inconsiderate as to burn coal that emits the densest clouds of carbon. Much to the discomfort of our helmsman, we are now compelled to crowd his little cockpit of a lower-deck, for the upper space is not sufficient for us all to stand upright in. Even with the care taken to prevent mishaps, a few of us have been brought in rough contact with the slimy brick-work. All the time of our underground passage, we are being half-stifled with the undigested fuel already mentioned. We get into daylight again, in ten minutes or so from the moment of entering this length of Stygian perspective; and, having got into daylight, we find that we have also got into Agar Town. A sort of very 'vulgar Venice,' indeed, is Agar Town.

Our gondola seems quite a state-barge, worthy to carry Cleopatra, or the Lord Mayor, as we glide silently through this dismal spot, in which crime, and want, and ignorance herd in desperate citizenship together. The Agar townsmen are mostly abroad, plying a questionable livelihood; but the Agar townswomen shew their faces at squalid windows, and over tumble-down walls and rotten palings, and grin at us as we go past. The stone-yard of a workhouse is bounded on one of its sides by our water-way, and the parish Sisyphus pauses in his weary task to gaze, but not to grin. Men sunk deep in wretchedness are for the most part stupified, and their faces wear a blank rather than a painful aspect. But it is otherwise with the abased and outcast daughters of the great family. In the progress of our fast canal-boat, we light upon this moral difference of the sexes. After the stone-yard comes a cinder-heap, a black mound, with several smaller black mounds, which are the siftings of the great one. It is a black wharf on which this heap stands, and a wild troop of black-faced women, in rags like sooty cobwebs, are working on it with great black sieves. The sight is painful enough, its utter poverty appearing as a fall of many degrees from the low estate of the stone-yard; but the dust-women are not, as the stone-breakers were, moodily silent. These poor creatures, who look as if they had neglected to go out of mourning for the hope that died before they knew it, shriek and gibber at us voyagers, and point with weird motion and shrill laughter at the strange craft steaming by.

The locks that we pass through are five. Both the *Pioneer* and her satellite go side by side when these impediments occur. In the time of stoppage, we have leisure to observe the people on the quays, and we do observe that they are not at all the same kind of people whom we see in our streets. Their dress, their manner, their language are foreign to the Londoner. They are Warwickers, mainly, these boatmen and lock-keepers of the Grand Junction Canal. Though some of them are metropolitan fixtures, and all are as much in Middlesex as in the north-western counties of England, there is not one who wears a London-made suit of clothes, or a London hat, or a London behaviour. For them, the obsolete act of parliament, forbidding any buttons but metal ones, appears to be

still in force. For them are flat seal-skin caps of great circumference especially manufactured; for them Shakspearian phrases, which puzzle the annotators, but which Warwickshire has popularly retained, do still exist. I heard two of these men, an old and a young one, talking together, like the grave-diggers in *Hamlet*, or like old Gobbo and Launcelot, or like any pair of Shakspeare's clowns you may mention. Will this loose-clad, brass-buttoned, fur-capped population of the canal and its banks continue to regard our fast canal-boat with the placidity which at present characterises their view? Or will the terrible fact dawn upon their understandings, that this same 'intr'doocahun o' stea-am on canaals' may tend to the getting rid of a considerable amount of loose-clad, fur-capped, brass-buttoned human labour? Political economy teaches us, and truly teaches us, that every saving of toil, or rather every step by which toil is directed into more profitable channels, is a universal gain in the long-run; but the run is, unfortunately, a little too long for those who have calculated only on that common distance from hand to mouth; and while improvement's crop of grass is growing, certain steeds are but too liable to starve. There is hope, however, that the increase of the Company's business, consequent on the fresh advantages they are now prepared to offer to the public, will enable them to retain all their servants, distributing them over a greater number of boats. As for those real 'steeds,' hitherto employed to tow the vessels on the Grand Junction Canal, there is no fear of *their* starving—horse-flesh never does.

It is freezing hard, and snowing gently, as we steam onward past the locks of Camden Town, Kentish Town, and the Hampstead Road. Our pale faces, streaked with black, our red noses and blue lips, make up a wobegone picture. The banks of the canal are now getting more and more desolate; it is a dreary journey along the Regent's Park, and the gardens of the Zoological Society. Our fast canal-boat is the slowest of slow steamers, considered as the chosen vessel of a pleasure-trip. That the timber and the heavy grocery goods are travelling at twice the speed which they would attain in a barge hauled along by a horse and a rope, is true enough; but that the more or less scientific gentlemen in the steerage find this doubled rate of transit somewhat under the reasonable requirements of deck-passengers, compelled to stand in one narrow spot, on an intensely cold day, I think is equally a matter of fact. Philosophy itself could not, under the circumstances, feel proper gratitude towards Mr Burch, of Macclesfield, who invented the screw for propelling the boat that carried the goods that lay on the wharf that the Grand Junction Canal Company built by the City Basin.

It is a dreary journey, still, along St John's Wood, with the sloping gardens of North and South Bank on either hand. The backs of the houses in North and South Bank have a raw look, and the gardens are not very cheerful, at anyrate, on this December day. On we go, with paler cheeks, and redder noses, and bluer lips, till we have exchanged St John's Wood for Paddington, and have struck a few sparks of life out of that less forlorn-looking region. Here the canal is made ornamental, with islands and pleasure-boats, and terrace-like banks. A very pretty entrance to this vicinage is formed by a short tunnel, the outer arch being covered with ivy.

Arrived at the Gauge House, we transfer our numbed feet from the deck of the *Pioneer* to the little wharf, where we have the pleasure of seeing the cargo weighed by a very simple process. The weight of the boat being previously ascertained, all that the gauger has to do is to find, by a long measuring-rod, the depth from her water-line to her keel; and a calculation by figures will then enable him to tell the exact weight of the cargo to a fraction.

Three cabs convey the party of more or less scientific gentlemen to St James's Hall, at the entrance to which place of various entertainment we all alight, and are taken by the idle crowd for an exceedingly dirty vestry. Dinner has been ordered, a day or two before, and we are happily in time not only for that, but for soap and water.

THE FAMILY SCAPEGRACE.

CHAPTER XI.—THE PERILS OF RAVENSDROPPING.

THE modesty of talent—provided that it be accompanied with a stock of patience—is always sure of its reward. If Master Richard Arbour had ever chanced to plume himself among the foreign customers of Mr Tipsaway upon his knowledge of the French tongue, it is not unlikely that the moment which found him in the grasp of the Russian count would have been his last. Rage and fear contended in the man's evil eyes, and blanched his cheek, while his wicked fingers tightened about the poor lad's throat, as though their trade was murder. Dick's countenance was rapidly growing black, when he bethought himself of throwing an expressive glance at the table, and of making as though he would reach with one of his hands the pencil that still lay there. He felt convinced that his life depended on the count's imagining that his secret was yet undiscovered—that he was a deaf and dumb man still in *his* eyes as in those of the rest of the world—and, therefore, instead of exclaiming: 'Oh, spare me, for I never meant to find you out;' or, 'Forgive me, count, for discovering that you are an impostor,' he judiciously confined himself to making signs.

The count relaxed his gripe to consider a little, and then released the lad altogether, though taking care to stand between him and the door. Dick took up the pencil and wrote: 'I am very sorry to have disturbed you, sir; I thought you had all left the room, and was coming in to put it straight.'

'You lie!' returned the count, in the most delicate and microscopic handwriting that ever was seen.

'I also came to see if there was any brandy left,' wrote Dick.

This did not happen to be in the least the case, but it was more in accordance with the Russian's notion of what was probable, than the simple truth of the other answer.

'What did you see?' inquired Gotsuchakoff, setting down the words with his practised fingers, while he kept his lynx eyes fixed upon the trembling youth.

'I saw *you*, count.'

'What else, boy; what else?'

'Please, count, I saw that you had drunk all the brandy.'

Gotsuchakoff was evidently at a nonplus. He did not know whether to believe the boy or not. He hesitated as to whether he should push him further, afraid, in case of his being unaware that he had really spoken, of impressing him too much with the importance of what had happened.

'And did you not *hear* anything?' wrote the count, unable to bear the horrid uncertainty which consumed him.

This was the most perilous moment of all to Dick, and luckily the lad was by this time fully aware of it. His features expressed the most extreme bewilderment, and even a touch of drollery. '*Hear*, count?' wrote he, in rather a shaky hand, it must be confessed; 'how should I hear anything, with nobody but you in the room?'

The Russian was looking him through and through with a terrible distrust, but the smile which the lad had conjured up seemed completely to disarm him. He drew a long breath of intense relief, and wiped away the drops that stood upon his pale forehead. He had but uttered a single French word, after all, reasoned he, which, even if distinctly heard, might very well